United Nations E/CN.6/2018/NGO/39

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 January 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-second session
12–23 March 2018
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Catholic Women's League Australia Incorporated (CWLA), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

17-22412 (E) 150118

Please recycle

Statement

The Catholic Women's League of Australia (CWLA) represents six member organisations across Australia. These member organisations are based in each of the States but not in the two Territories. We also have connection to similar organisations world-wide through the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO).

Our role includes advocating for disadvantaged groups of women and their children, at local State and Commonwealth levels; providing practical, physical support, in our own country and to overseas communities and lobbying Government on behalf of the marginalized.

CSW 62's Priority theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls; Review theme: Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women blend well with our service and vision.

Background Information on the Role of Catholic Women's League Member Organisations

Each Australian State undertakes social services priorities according to perceived needs in their area. Western Australia undertook a State-wide survey on the theme: Grandparents raising their grandchildren. Rural grandmothers find the strain placed on them and access to services particularly difficult.

The League in Western Australia also provides scholarships for rural students who would otherwise find continuing their education to tertiary level difficult.

Victoria has subsidized water tanks in arid remote areas, overseas, to improve living conditions of women and girls.

Through a special collection, League members have also assisted with funding, in three separate rural locations, single mothers who have chosen to give birth to their babies, providing practical support to these mothers and their little children.

League members provide budget priced accommodation, at Mary Glowrey House, close to the major hospitals in the capital city of Melbourne, for rural family members visiting relatives and loved-ones.

New South Wales proposed a Motion, on Child Pornography, at our recent National Conference to raise the awareness of the members of CWLA throughout Australia to campaign and work against the existence and growth of the child pornography industry; and to lobby the Federal Government with information about the initiatives of the United Kingdom government to eliminate child pornography.

The League furthermore has made a Submission to a New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Youth Suicide.

Tasmanian League members assisted with a survey on palliative care services across the island. The Department of Health and Human Services is developing a Palliative Care Charter to enable them to improve and address the social, spiritual, emotional and physical needs of patients.

League members also support women who are facing an unexpected pregnancy.

South Australia League members urged the State and Federal Governments to make more funding available for suitable accommodation and better services for younger people suffering from early onset dementia, stroke, acquired brain injury, down syndrome and any other illness or disability.

Queensland League members provided a submission to a Bill introduced by the Queensland Government, the Abortion Amendment Bill. They supported pro-life initiatives in their State, which resulted in the withdrawal of a Bill to de-criminalise abortion for any reason to full-term. A second Bill, also withdrawn, would have suppressed free speech anywhere near abortion clinics.

Our Federal and State Governments are aware of many challenges facing rural women. They have and are setting up programs to overcome challenges in the areas of education, health, lack of jobs in rural centres, problems with access to services, lack of mental health services, problems which arise out of isolation.

Voluntary services, such as Anglicare (Anglican Church), St Vincent de Paul (Catholic Church), Salvos (Salvation Army) report other issues, in rural and remote areas, such as:

- A larger proportion of unskilled labour.
- Gender inequalities in employment and remuneration.
- High rent and utility costs.
- Poverty.
- Debts incurred in times of drought.
- Homelessness.
- Large distances that have to be travelled to access help.
- Educational choices when there are no universities or centres for tertiary education in the area.
- Lack of rural doctors.
- Limited child care services.
- Domestic violence.
- Drug and alcohol addiction.
- Youth suicide.
- Difficulties for older people and people with disabilities to access the support services they need due to a lack of services in rural regions.

CWLA recognizes other challenges which impact on women generally and in particular on rural women. Through our Research Officer and Convenors, CWLA has presented Submissions to both the Federal Government and State Governments on:

- The Standing Committee Inquiry into Surrogacy
- The Harm Done to Children through Access to Pornography on the Internet
- Termination of Pregnancy: Improving Access for Northern Territory Women to Safe Termination of Pregnancy Services
- Suicide by Veterans and Ex-Service Personnel
- Childhood Overweight and Obesity

- New South Wales Human Trafficking Inquiry
- Child Protection and Education legislation (Reporting of Abuse) to the Queensland Government

Two issues of great concern to members across Australia, which will have detrimental effects in cities and country towns, but which could be life-threatening in rural and remote areas are:

- The Safe Schools Education program, which will be mandatory in Western Australia and Victoria. This dangerous and divisive program promotes gender transitioning through taking irreversible steps, such as surgery and the use of hormones. The causes of this desire have not been adequately and scientifically investigated and are not understood, nor have the consequences of such drastic action.
- Use of the abortifacient RU 486 in remote areas where access to medical services is limited, ultra-sound imaging to assess gestational age is unavailable, in many rural centres. Even doctors with the necessary ultra-sound qualifications are in short supply. A 'Telemedicine' abortion service aimed at rural women is now available across Australia. These mail order abortion offices have sprung up in Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Darwin and Brisbane as well as many larger country cities. The two drugs which make up RU 486, mifepristone and misoprostol, are delivered by mail. Follow up services are seriously compromised by the distances women have to travel to obtain assistance.

CWLA awaits with interest the Agreed Conclusions produced by CSW62. The challenges facing rural women and girls are difficult but not insurmountable. Given good will and a philosophy of care for women at all stages of life much can be done.